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A salutation from the Yearly Meeting in
London . 1857

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By Exchange



A SALUTATION

IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

FROM

THE YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS,

IN LONDON,

TO ALL WHO BEAR THE NAME OF

FRIENDS.

LONDON:

1857.

NEW-BEDFORD: RE-PRINTED BY DIRECTION OF
NEW-ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING,
1857.

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By exchange

YEARLY MEETING, 1857.

This Meeting has been introduced into a lively feeling of Christian interest in the welfare of the Members of our Society, and also of those who bear the name of Friends, wherever situate; and, in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, it has concluded to issue the following Address, commending it to the serious consideration and cordial acceptance of those to whom it is addressed.

On behalf of the Yearly Meeting of Friends, held in London by adjournments, from the 20th of the Fifth month to the 29th of the same, inclusive, 1857.

(Signed) JOSEPH THORP,
Clerk.

M

A SALUTATION,

&c., &c.

It is with hearts humbled under a solemn sense of the depth and extent of our obligations unto Him who has called us by his grace in the Gospel of his beloved Son, and of his continued mercy towards us, that this Meeting offers the word of Christian salutation to all who bear the name of Friends.

We have looked back upon the two centuries of diversified experience through which our Society has now passed,—of trials from without, and trials not less proving from within. Marked as this experience has been by the gracious manifestations of the faithfulness and love of Him who first united our forefathers in religious fellowship, we have desired that our hearts may be open to those lessons of warning, instruction or encouragement which He may design for us in relation to our present position.

Let it not be forgotten that vital Christianity cannot be transmitted as an inheritance to posterity. In each member of every successive generation the struggle is renewed with sin and evil in ever-varying forms. Each must submit to the same transforming work of Divine grace, if he would realize for himself an adoption into the family of the redeemed. And whilst all the promises of God to his believing and faithful children are “Yea and amen” in Christ for ever, He has not seen meet to grant, either to individuals or to churches, how-

ever greatly favored, any immunity from danger, or from the necessity of continued watchfulness unto prayer. How earnest is the warning, in relation to this subject, addressed by the Apostle to the Church of the Romans, when referring to the cutting off of those whom, as the children of Abraham according to the flesh, he compares to the natural branches. "Because of unbelief," saith he, "they were broken off, and thou standest by faith; be not high-minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed, lest He also spare not thee." Let us not shrink from taking our part in this warning; and as we look upon the mournful spectacle presented by the gradual decay of spiritual life and purity, and by the spread of worldliness and corruption, in the several Churches planted by the Apostles, may we fear for ourselves, in the recollection that we also are exposed to temptations, different it may be, but not less dangerous; and are alike liable to fall away.

Many indeed have been our mercies and our privileges; and it is good for us that the remembrance of them should have its due weight upon our hearts. Who amongst us, that has been instructed aright, can reflect, without feelings of humble gratitude, upon the wonderful breaking forth of the glorious light of the Gospel, as through a dark and thick cloud, which took place in this country and many parts of the Continent of Europe, in the course of the sixteenth century? It was indeed a time when the Church was called out of the wilderness to renew her covenant with the Lord. Let us not forget how much we owe, under the Divine blessing, to those who then earnestly contended and patiently suffered for the faith once delivered to the saints. In the place of the fables of an unhallowed superstition or the speculations of worldly wisdom, we

may now freely read the records of Divine truth in the pages of Holy Scripture. The way of salvation is to us no longer eclipsed by a cloud of human traditions and ceremonies, but the Lord Jesus is openly acknowledged as the one door of hope and of access unto the Father, the one Mediator of the new and everlasting covenant. May we ever thankfully prize and diligently use these precious privileges!

And is it not instructive often to retrace those marks of Divine condescension which were so eminently vouchsafed in the gathering of our religious Society? Shall we ever cease reverently to acknowledge that it was nothing short of the immediate interposition of the holy Head of the Church which, at the cost of so much that was held dear, led so many, widely differing from each other in outward position, in mental cultivation and in religious experience, to separate from other professions, and which united them as a distinct Christian community? What but the immediate teaching of his Spirit could have imparted to them, little as many of them were skilled in human learning, so deep an insight into so many neglected and almost forgotten truths? Whence but from this Source sprang their devotedness and zeal, their holy boldness, their fervent love to the cause of their Divine Master? Who but He could have sustained them amidst their unwearied labors and deep sufferings in such a cause, or crowned their services with that extraordinary measure of success which, when duly considered in connection with their character and position, must ever render their rise and history one of the most memorable amongst the records of true religion in the seventeenth century?

It must not be forgotten by those who would form a right estimate of these labors, to how great an extent,

from the admixture of worldly or political influences and of human infirmity, the work of reformation in the sixteenth century had been left incomplete. In that long and dark night of apostacy by which it was preceded, the idea, so foreign to primitive Christianity, of the possibility of performing the service of God by proxy, had gradually become prevalent. The dependence of the people in religious things had become almost exclusively placed upon man, and the view of Christ in those varied relations in which He has been pleased to reveal himself, as "Head over all things," to his Church had become proportionately obscure. And whilst, in the interval between the dawn of the Reformation and the age of our early Friends, the progress of light upon subjects of the highest interest had been great, how imperfect was the use which had been made of it, and how many were the particulars in which it yet remained to be more powerfully and searchingly applied. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit was more or less acknowledged in words, but his gracious operations were, in the various systems of religion, for the most part exclusively associated with outward means; whilst his immediate teaching, if not openly questioned or denied, was far too generally undervalued or disregarded. The prevailing opinions and usages in relation to the service and worship of God had led to the gradual assumption, by one man in a congregation, of duties which originally belonged to the various members. The presence of this one man was thought essential to the performance of public worship, and even to the due solemnization of Christian marriage and Christian burial; and to him were confined, almost exclusively, the important functions of ministry in the Church. These functions had long almost universally

ceased to be exercised in accordance with the injunction, "Freely ye have received, freely give." Though in general acknowledged to be grounded upon a special Divine call, the performance of them was still too much looked upon as an effort of the human understanding, assisted by human art and learning, rather than the exercise of a spiritual gift depending upon a measure of heavenly wisdom and qualification. And whilst a false or greatly exaggerated estimate was attached to outward means, the waiting upon God in connection with public worship, in humble reliance upon the immediate operations of his Spirit, was almost wholly unknown. All these things had obviously tended to secularize the church, to divert both the ministers and the people from their dependence upon the Fountain of living waters, to lower the standard of holiness to which all are called, and to draw away the professors of Christianity from the simplicity and purity of conduct and conversation incumbent upon the children of God.

And truly it was not for any worthiness of theirs, but in his own rich and unmerited grace, that it pleased the Lord to grant to our forefathers not only to see and to deplore these and other prevailing corruptions, but, as a gathered Church, to bear a clear and distinct testimony against them, and to the purity, simplicity, unworldliness and essential spirituality of the religion of Christ. In thus speaking of our predecessors and their work for the Lord, we desire not their exaltation, but our own and your instruction. They were men of like passions as we are, compassed with many infirmities, and partaking, also, in some measure, of the characteristics of the age in which they lived; of which traces are not wanting, both in their actions and in their writings. Whilst we thankfully commemorate

the work and grace of God in them and through them, we would bear in mind the impressive language of George Fox, concerning himself and his brethren, "We are nothing ; Christ is all." Especially would we recur to their own emphatic and oft repeated declaration, that it was no new Gospel that they were called to preach. They had no new truths to communicate to the world. The Christianity of the New Testament, in its comprehensiveness and its simplicity, was at once the extent and the limit of the message which their Lord had given them to declare. He who was manifested as "the Word made flesh," the Messiah in whom the types and the prophecies of the former dispensation receive their full and final accomplishment, was to them, as to the primitive believers, the incarnate Immanuel in whom they trusted, their all-sufficient sacrifice and propitiation, their one Mediator, Advocate and High Priest. And it was in order that others might be brought to the full acknowledgment and enjoyment of this most precious Saviour, in all his gracious offices, that they were willing to spend and be spent in urging upon them an unreserved submission of their hearts to the work of his Spirit, whereby they might come both to see their sin, and to know Christ to save them from the guilt and power of it. The call to them, and to the Church through them, was emphatically a call of mercy and of truth,—a call out of sin and worldliness to the true enjoyment of the unmixed blessings of the Gospel, in full devotedness of heart to the Lord's work and service.

And does it not become the members of our religious Society, everywhere, in all sincerity and seriousness, often to examine themselves how far they have walked worthy of such a vocation, or answered the gracious

purposes of our Heavenly Father in giving them a place and a name among the Churches of Christ? If in the days of our fathers there was a testimony to be borne to the purity, the simplicity and the spirituality of the Gospel, is no such testimony needed now? Is the warfare appointed for us accomplished? Is the harvest yet fully gathered in? Have we not rather cause for deep humiliation in the retrospect of our unfaithfulness, that whilst the necessity has been no less pressing, and the obligations upon us no less powerful and urgent, our labors in the vineyard should have been so inadequate to the emergency?

From age to age has the language of the Redeemer been fulfilled in the experience of his followers, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household." Vainly has the enemy striven to destroy by attacks from without, when no entrance has been given him. But when the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things have been allowed to enter into the heart, then the seed has been choked and rendered unfruitful. Like the Churches of old, we have had our day of suffering and of increase, when, amidst the frowns and oppression of the world, the blessing of the Lord has been richly poured forth. We have known, also, a day of ease, of outward prosperity, and of abated zeal. How many, in the course of the last and of the present centuries, under a training which has led them into habits of strict sobriety, industry and economy, have gradually become at once rich and worldly, or, if themselves mercifully preserved from spiritual ruin, have left possessions to their children that have proved to them as greivous entanglements, or as snares to beguile them from the simplicity which is in Christ. Others, who have run well for a season,

have fainted by the way. And how many, to their own unspeakable loss, and that of the Church, have rested in a merely traditional acceptance of the truth, or slumbered away their lives in a state of passive lukewarmness or cold unconcern.

But not alone from these things have weakness and desolation entered our borders. Trials in faith and doctrine have not been wanting. The root of these things lies deep in man's fallen and unsubjected will. Even they who had been privileged with the teaching of an inspired Apostle stood in need of the awful warning, that from among their own selves should men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. But in calling to mind the large measure of unity and outward fellowship which so long prevailed among the faithful members of our religious Society, in what language shall we express the exercise and travail of spirit into which we have been brought, in the view of the mournful divisions and separations that have taken place amongst us within the last sixty years? How can we think, without grief and humiliation, of the multitudes in America, still retaining the name of Friends, who have been beguiled by the specious appearance of a refined spirituality, and many of whom have been led on, step by step, to the rejection of fundamental Christian truth, and even to the denial of the Lord that bought them? How can we cease to deplore that others in that land, professing a high value for our Christian principles, have allowed themselves to be drawn away from that fellowship and harmony with their brethren which they once enjoyed? Nor can we think without sorrow of some in this country who, whilst loving their Lord and Redeemer, have become, from very different causes, gradually alienated

from some of those spiritual views of the Gospel dispensation which are precious to us, and have ceased to be united with us in outward religious fellowship. Have these things befallen us without a cause? and do they not proclaim, in language not to be mistaken, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain"?

For, stripped and weakened as is the condition of our religious Society, both in this country and elsewhere, compared with what it might have been had all been truly faithful, it has pleased the Lord, in his tender compassion, still to preserve us, and to give us evidence, from season to season, of his gracious regard. Without any arrangements for a stated outward ministry, our meetings for Divine worship are still kept up, to the refreshment and edification, as we thankfully believe, of many who, under the ministrations of the Comforter, are experimentally taught to worship God in the spirit, to rejoice in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh. Without any system of human preparation, endowment or remuneration, a living ministry is yet, in the Lord's unmerited mercy, continued amongst us; and it is with feelings of thankfulness that we recur to the succession of faithful laborers, down to our own day, who have been eminently called and qualified by the Head of the Church freely to testify of the riches of his grace, whose services He has owned, and whose memory is precious. We would speak of these things with reverence, desiring to dwell in lowliness and contrition of spirit before the Lord, under the humbling sense of his dealings with us, in his mercies and in his judgments.

The deadening influence of lukewarmness, of traditional formality, and of a worldly spirit; the danger of departing, upon pretexts however plausible, from those

things which are revealed in the Holy Scriptures ; the necessity of complete submission to the operations of the Spirit of Truth upon the soul, and of individually realising all that is comprehended in conversion unto God ;—these are among the lessons which, in the review of the past, we would desire might be effectually brought home to the consciences of all who bear the name of Friends, under the heartfelt conviction of their personal responsibilities in connexion with them. May these lessons not be lost upon any. But, in the recollection of the solemn warnings which have been received, may all cherish a deep and serious sense of the importance and necessity of being each brought to the blessed experience of what it is to pass from that state of alienation from God, in which all are by nature, into that state of reconciliation with Him, in which the Lord Jesus is known as our Propitiation, our Shepherd and our King, taking away all condemnation, and blotting out all trespasses in his own blood. We are well aware that it is only under the work of the Holy Spirit that any can be thus taught the preciousness of Christ. But let us never doubt that the Spirit graciously works in our hearts for this very purpose ; nor forget that it is to them that receive Christ, and to them only, that He gives power to become the sons of God. Let it be our individual concern to dwell much and often both upon the inestimable value of the privileges of the Gospel and upon the comprehensiveness of its requirements. Let us frequently and seriously meditate upon the character and work of our Holy Redeemer. Abiding under the government of his Spirit, let us follow Him in lowliness and self-denial, amidst the duties and the conflicts of life. Let us in nowise attempt to limit the operations of his grace upon our souls. May the

fervent and effectual prayer ascend to the Father of mercies, as a continual sacrifice in the name of Jesus, Thy will be done in us even as it is done in heaven.

And, whilst pressing after this experience for ourselves, may we cherish a warm and abiding interest on account of our beloved younger friends; that our duties towards them, whether as parents, heads of families, or in a more general capacity, may not be neglected. Let us be concerned that in all our households they may be carefully instructed in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and of our Christian principles and testimonies, and be truly brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The present is a day of inquiry and discussion, of much bold assertion and varied opinions. How important is it to the young disciple, under such circumstances, to be kept faithful to the teaching and training of his Divine Master! How necessary that he should not mistake the false liberty of the natural will, which is in bondage to its own unrenewed desires, for the true and glorious liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free, and in which his service is their delight! Let no knowledge, no gifts, no merely human acquirements or qualifications, ever be preferred before the humbling operations of Divine grace. It is not they who are ever halting at the threshold of the sanctuary, doubting and questioning, but they who are willing to conform to the needful discipline, and to enter in through the appointed means of access, who become prepared to join in the services, and to partake of the inestimable privileges, of the true worshippers of God.

The more our hearts are given up to the constraints of the love of Christ, the more shall we be redeemed out of the narrow circle of earthly and selfish pursuits,

and, with perceptions enlarged to view the things of time in their true relation to eternity, and with strength proportioned to our every need, the more shall we be enabled clearly to discern and faithfully to occupy our place of appointed service in the household of faith, and in the general family of man. And how amply is the opportunity for such a service afforded to the true and faithful members of our religious Society! Where are to be found greater encouragements than are presented by our religious principles to a life of true self-denial and devotedness to God? Where else can be enjoyed a larger measure of Christian liberty, or a freer exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit? In what course of training is the Christian character likely to ripen to a fuller maturity than that into which our religious principles, when truly embraced and faithfully practised, necessarily lead; in which the Lord Jesus is glorified in all his offices, and the soul is brought into a holy subjection to the immediate teaching and government of his Spirit?

Very instructive is it often to recur to the varied aspects of that new relationship into which the true believers are brought, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, wherein holiness is made distinctly to appear as the mark at which they are to aim. As those who have been bought with a price, they are again and again reminded that they are not their own, but bound in all things to glorify their God. As his reconciled children, they are exhorted to walk worthy of Him unto all pleasing. As wrestlers in a mighty conflict, the crown of righteousness is set before them; and as a Royal Priesthood they are instructed to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit; to put on the fine linen, even the righteousness of saints;

and to offer up spiritual sacrifices, as in the Lord's holy temple, acceptable to Him through Jesus Christ.

How precious is the unity which is known amongst brethren engaged in exercises such as these! Their characters, their position, their gifts, their services, may greatly differ, but their hearts are one. They have one Father, who is in heaven; they serve one Master, even Christ; and amidst all the diversities of gifts and administrations it is the same Spirit that worketh all in all, dividing to every man severally as He will. We know indeed that to realize these things fully is no small attainment,—that the complete subjection of the human heart and understanding to Divine grace is a great and a deep work. In proportion as this is not accomplished in any, will be the evidence that these are not made perfect in love. Even in the primitive Church the spirit of party and of division was early manifested. There were those who pleaded for an unhallowed liberty, whilst there were others who, with but an incomplete understanding of Divine truth, were ready to make their own narrow conceptions the universal standard, and rigidly to exclude from communion all who were not equally straitened with themselves. Recollecting how much we have already suffered, may we be anxious to guard against these snares. Watching one over another for good, may our love towards each other be pure and fervent. May our hearts be shut against all that scatters or divides, or that would beget or increase a spirit of jealousy or distrust. Bearing in mind the long-suffering and patience which we have ourselves experienced, let us be willing to exercise all patience and forbearance towards others. And if through unmerited mercy we have been taught to see more clearly, let it be ours to seek that our

growth in knowledge be accompanied by the evidences of a growth in grace, and ever to remember that the deepest experience in the things of God is that which still brings into and preserves in the deepest humility and the most fervent love.

And now, in conclusion, we would adopt the language of the Apostle, in a fresh sense of the depth and fulness of its meaning, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." Fervent are our desires that all that in anywise hinders or obstructs the full participation of this grace may be removed. In the reverent acknowledgment of the "one Lord," in the heartfelt acceptance of the "one faith," may we be indeed baptized by the "one Spirit" into the "one body." Thus drinking into that one Spirit, may a true restoration be brought about wherever divisions or differences have existed; and, through its effectual working, in the Lord's good pleasure, may all who bear the name of Friends be once more joined together in the bonds of outward religious fellowship in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. Walking in the love of Him who gave himself for us, "an offering and a sacrifice unto God," may all be found in their several allotments, each filling up the measure of appointed duty, "with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel." Thus builded upon the Foundation, Christ Jesus, may there be in the end, in the Lord's unmerited mercy, nothing to prevent that full communion which is the blessed portion of all who, through living faith in Him who hath loved them, enter into life eternal.



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